

Canine Counterinsurgency in Indian-occupied Kashmir

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Abstract

In this article, we analyze contemporary discourses of counterinsurgency in relation to dogs in Kashmir, the disputed northernmost Himalayan territory of Jammu and Kashmir, and the site of a prolonged military occupation. We are interested in the widespread presence of street dogs in Kashmir as both embodiments and instruments of military terror. We consider the competing narratives of how canines function variously in Kashmiri perceptions of counterinsurgency and in Indian nationalist discourses. Through ethnographic and cultural analyses, we track how street dogs appear in various cultural and public narratives as the Indian military's "first line of defense," and the ways in which their overwhelming presence produces deep anxieties about the nature and extent of the military occupation of Kashmir.

Keywords

counterinsurgency, dog terror, Military Working Dogs, Indian occupation, Kashmir, street dogs

In a deleted scene from *No Fathers in Kashmir*, a teen love story set against the backdrop of Kashmir's prolonged military occupation, a gravedigger recounts events from the 1990s to a young British Muslim Kashmiri girl searching for her missing father (Kumar, 2019). "Every army camp had an interrogation room" in

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the 1990s, where Kashmiris were tortured and killed, and then buried “quickly,” he tells her in a despondent voice (Kumar, 2019). “The dogs would get them at night,” he continues (Kumar, 2019). Dogs “had developed a taste for human flesh,” so “it wasn’t unusual to see a dog running around the streets with a hand or a foot” (Kumar, 2019). Pausing for a long time, as if haunted by the horrors of the past, he claims that the dogs of Kashmir are different: they are “not like normal dogs” (Kumar, 2019). Traumatized by his own retelling, the gravedigger abruptly leaves the site of what appears to be a freshly dug grave.

This narrative film is set in Kashmir, the world’s most densely militarized space, which has been under India’s military occupation since 1947, the year that India gained its independence and was partitioned to form the Muslim-majority state of Pakistan and the nominally secular state of India. Both India and Pakistan have since exerted their claims over Kashmir and fought four wars over it even as there has been a prolonged movement in the region demanding *azadi* or independence since the 1940s. In 1989, Kashmiris began an armed struggle against India’s occupation with moral and logistical support from Pakistan, a popular rebellion that was countered by India through the disproportionate use of military force and violent counterinsurgency tactics to silence all forms of dissent. The Indian security forces’ repertoire included enforced disappearances, custodial killings, sexual abuse and torture, and psychological warfare (Duschinski et al., 2018). India’s violent repression of Kashmiris has been buttressed with legal protections for the armed forces for their human rights abuses and, most recently, constitutional maneuvers aimed at removing Kashmir’s limited legislative autonomy, a point whose significance we return to at the end of this article.

The dogs evoked in the scene from *No Fathers in Kashmir* described above are street dogs¹ and are constructed as an informal ancillary force of the Indian Army insofar as they are described as cleaning up the military’s human rights violations in the 1990s by literally devouring the evidence of mutilated limbs. Since then there has been a shift in the status of street dogs relative to the military occupation of Kashmir. Where in the 1990s street dogs were perceived as loosely associated with the Indian forces, in the 2010s the army has anointed them as soldiers in their own right. For example, an article posted on the Indian news and entertainment site, *Rediff* (2016), extols the counterinsurgency virtues of Military Working Dogs (MWDs) in Indian-occupied Kashmir, and dubs them “the mute sentinels of Kashmir.” Rattling off the various responsibilities of MWDs, which include acting as guards, detecting Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), and tracking suspected militants, the article introduces readers to individual dogs: Trigger, Tractor, Sam, and Caesar. In the midst of these German Shepherds, Rottweilers, and Labrador Retrievers, the breeds most often employed by the Indian Army, we learn of Jojo, a Bakarwali dog, a breed which is found locally, mostly in “hilly areas” (Kaul, 2016).² Kaul (2016) implies that Jojo’s origins are humble; he is an ordinary street dog who has been recruited into the Indian military to disperse “violent demonstrators.” Indeed, according to politically conservative Indian websites dedicated to animal rights, Indian street dogs are among the

world's "most intelligent" and are therefore deployed in large numbers by the Indian security forces to tackle Maoist "naxals" in troubled regions and the "terrorists" in Jammu and Kashmir (*Jaagruti*, 2010). (The basis for this assessment of the Indian street dogs' intelligence is never given, suggesting that it expresses national pride rather than an actual evaluation of canine aptitude.) One such website warns against treating Indian street dogs as a health and safety "nuisance," and urges its readers to reframe dog-inflicted violence as a befitting response towards "untoward people," mostly Kashmiris, who pose a threat to India's territorial integrity (*Jaagruti*, 2010). As "the unsung heroes in the war against terror in Kashmir," street dogs become India's saviors while Kashmiris are animalized, reduced to their bestial instincts that are most starkly expressed, according to Indian commentators, during Kashmir's frequent street protests and violent attacks on India's security forces (ul-Hassan, 2015).

In this article, we analyze how street dogs become extensions of India's counterinsurgency war against Kashmiris through the multiple roles they play for the military, including as guard dogs, assault dogs, trackers of suspected insurgents, and IED detectors, and to instill fear in prisoners and the wider population. We explore how the Indian police and military forces, as well as several animal rights groups, frame street dogs as defenders of the Indian nation and its territorial integrity. Public discourses invoke concern over animal welfare to cement India's occupation of Kashmir and reinforce pre-existing power differentials between Indians and Kashmiris based on religious and racial identities. Such contingent and unfolding alliances between the Indian animal rights movement and a deepening Islamophobia situate Kashmiris as civilizationally inferior and, hence, undeserving of fundamental human rights. We also argue that the occupying logic of a military state aligns with neoliberal virtues of pet care that have become seamless extensions of a Hindu ethic of inclusivity amidst an increasingly polarized religious context in India. In other words, appeals to animal rights and "canine citizenship" mask virulent and violent forms of Hindu nationalism, which are reinforced and enacted on a quotidian basis against Kashmiris (Uddin, 2003).³ Our intent in this article is to analyze the circulation of the figure of the street dog in both ethnographic interviews with Kashmiris and the numerous blogs devoted to canine welfare for what they reveal about the comparative valuation of life under military occupation.

The recent turn toward animal studies in anthropology has shown the remarkable ways in which categories of human and animal are "not inevitable or universal but shaped in particular contexts" by differently positioned actors (Mullin, 2002: 390). Instead of treating dogs and humans as mutually distinct entities, we take cues from multispecies ethnography to show the "effects of [human] entanglements with other kinds of living selves," and their implications for what it means to be human in fraught political contexts of racism, slavery, mass incarcerations, genocide, occupation, and war (Kohn, 2007: 4). Animals have long been incorporated into projects of empire building, their material capacities deployed, and at times enhanced, to remake borders and impose imperial visions of sovereignty

(Kosek, 2010). At times, such as along the US–Mexico border in Arizona, dogs join vultures and other desert-animals to scavenge the dead bodies of Mexican migrants, scattering their remains and making it impossible to track or document their deaths (De León, 2015). For Radhika Govindrajana (2018: 3), the concept of “relatedness” captures the multiple ways “the potential and outcome of a life always and already unfolds in relation to that of another,” and highlights how conceptions of species autonomy and the attendant boundaries between human and animal are perpetually negotiated and in a state of constant flux. In the case of Kashmir, the concern over street dogs, and the liberal humanitarian appeals to save them, attain meaning only against the denial of fundamental human rights to Kashmiris. The categories of canine personhood and Kashmiri personhood are dialectically produced under the prevailing conditions of a military occupation.

Tyler Wall (2014) has analyzed how police dogs “animalize the force of law” by functioning as literal weapons of the state and inflicting violence on “disobedient” populations, an ever expanding category of people that includes racialized bodies, dissident subjects, terrorists, and protesters. In Kashmir, the power of canines cannot be separated from the legal impunity that the Indian military enjoys for their routine human rights violations and its prolonged war on Kashmiri people (Wall, 2014). Dogs embody the force and bestiality of the state as they become vectors of militarized violence through the mauling and killing of Kashmiris; they represent the pervasiveness of control and containment meant to undermine people’s resistance against the Indian state. As we describe later, Kashmiris continue to resist characterizations of their civilizational backwardness by drawing attention to their “dwindling quality of life and diminished humanity” through protests that showcase street dogs and simultaneously expose the differential valuation of humans versus dogs in Kashmir (Khan, 2014: 256). Kashmiris have appropriated canines as a metaphor for the brutality of the state as evidenced by the pervasiveness of urban graffiti demanding “Indian dogs return to India.” In such invocations, Amit Baishya (2018: 5) states, “the feral otherness of the colonial occupier is equated and rendered coextensive with a familiar example of feral animality.” Indian street dogs, in sum, acquire multiple meanings, simultaneously encompassing associations with militarized violence, a virulent version of neoliberalized Hinduism, and spirited resistance to the national security state.

The dogs of war

India has one of the largest programs in the world to train and deploy MWDs; these canines assist troops in detecting explosives, sentry duty, and tracking of suspected “militants” (*Times of India*, 2016). MWDs have been deployed to different parts of India, including Kashmir, where many people now view dogs with suspicion and hostility (Allsopp, 2011: 19–20).⁴ Dogs have three acute physical senses which make them particularly useful in warfare: they have a much more developed sense of classificatory smell (e.g. they can group smells into categories such as “friendly and dangerous”); they have better night vision and a larger field

of vision than humans (250 degrees); and they have a heightened sense of hearing and are able to detect a higher range of pitch (Allsopp, 2011: 14–15).

Moreover, dogs can be trained to attack, making their teeth a literal embodiment of power and turning them into weapons of the state. By “violently seizing flesh deemed threatening to order,” Wall (2014: 4) observes, “trained dogs” instantiate forms of state violence that are continuous from ancient warfare to its modern counterpart, and, in effect, become “instruments of organized coercion and blood-letting.” In an interview to a prominent Indian newspaper, the Inspector General of India’s Central Reserve Police Force claims that “dogs give a combat unit more teeth” against what he calls “insurrectionists” (Chakrabarty, 2010). The targets of such official canine violence all too frequently have been defined by the racial and ethnic logics of state power, as Bénédicte Boisseron (2015: 18) analyzes in relation to African Americans in the United States. She explains that not only has “white collective consciousness in the Americas...been imposing images of ferocious dogs on black men,” but slave owners in the past and police in the present have also used large dogs to harass and coerce African Americans. In South Asia, where religion and ethnicity are often conjoined, the struggle for territorial sovereignty has rendered Kashmiri Muslims as the object-choice for canine violence by the Indian security forces.⁵

In vocabulary that eerily resembles the US military’s description of MWDs, Indian military officials also refer to their canine members as “force multipliers” (Chakrabarty, 2010). The Indian Army has about 1,200 MWDs, many of whom are deployed in Jammu and Kashmir, and along the Line of Control (LoC), to detect mines and IEDs and track suspected militants (*Times of India*, 2016).⁶ Apart from their general contributions, army officials particularly emphasize MWDs as a vital aspect of maintaining military control of Kashmir. Colonel N.S. Kanwar, the commandant of the army’s veterinary hospital in Srinagar, attests that “Where humans have failed, dogs have excelled in anti-insurgency operations. In Kashmir, every operation is led by a dog and a handler” (Mushtaq, 2003). “It is the dog and his handler who face militants first,” a military dog trainer avers: “One cannot imagine how many lives these dogs save” (Mushtaq, 2003). Such statements contribute to the sense, among many Kashmiris, that canines constitute the army’s first line of security against dissident Kashmiris.

The cultural meanings associated with the proliferation of street dogs in Kashmir’s towns and villages in the past decade must be understood in relation to Kashmir’s prolonged occupation by at least 738,000 military personnel who are currently deployed along the contested LoC and in Kashmir’s towns, cities, and villages (IPTK and APDP Report, 2015).⁷ The threat by the military is compounded by an estimated 90,000 stray dogs in Srinagar alone, and approximately 1 million in the entire valley (Umar, 2012). Dogs are a ubiquitous presence in Kashmir. You see them near military bunkers, around mounds of trash that the municipality lets accumulate on the streets, on the lanes and alleyways leading up to apartments and houses, and also seated on cars and trucks. As a Kashmiri journalist reports, “The canines have been storming its streets, chasing cars, pulling

down bicycle riders and often attacking pedestrians and school children” (Umar, 2012). In a five-year period, between 2008 and 2012, officials recorded approximately 80,000 dog bites and 20 rabies deaths (ul-Hassan, 2013). Statistics such as these have led the Jammu and Kashmir State Human Rights Commission to deem dog attacks a “violation of human rights” (Umar, 2012). For Kashmiris, the fact that street dogs often congregate in and around military cantonments, bunkers, and checkpoints facilitates their close association with MWDs. If formal MWDs “animalize the force of law,” street dogs informalize state terror while intensifying the culture of state impunity in Kashmir (Wall, 2014: 2). Street dog-inflicted violence functions as a supplement to that unleashed on Kashmiris by MWDs, sanctioned by the state and protected through legal provisions which guard the armed forces from prosecution.

While a generalized fear attends street dogs among Kashmiris, they are celebrated on the Indian mainland in ways that confirm local suspicions that these canines are tools of counterinsurgency. In an article posted online at *Jaagruti*, the anonymous author alerts readers to the dangers of Maoists, or “red terror,” who draw their inspiration from terrorists in Kashmir (*Jaagruti*, 2010). The author explains that the Maoists have launched a targeted killing campaign against India’s street dogs, because these loyal canines dare to “bark at the terrorists at night,” thereby, alerting the police and military to the presence of insurgents (*Jaagruti*, 2010). The article celebrates street dogs for their bravery and intelligence, while applauding them for being the nation’s loyal sentries. “Hail the Indian street dog,” the author proclaims, for its tireless and selfless service guarding neighborhoods; far from being a nuisance, the Indian street dog, which the terrorists want to see dead, is an abiding symbol of service and patriotism (*Jaagruti*, 2010).

These sentiments are echoed by numerous Indian Army officials, whose praise for the street dogs’ assistance in counterinsurgency campaigns blurs the distinction between them and MWDs. A retired army officer, Habib Rehman, reveals that every army picket from the LoC in the north-west to Arunachal Pradesh in the north-east has adopted a local “mongrel” to act as a watchdog (Karlekar, 2011). These canines, as Lt-Col. N.K. Airy points out, are “quick to train, easy to maintain,” and do not require a large capital investment (Karlekar, 2011). More importantly, they have the ability to discern between troops and local civilians, on the one hand, and strangers, on the other.⁸ It is not entirely clear whether he believes that the dogs perceive the differences between troops and local civilians because of their innate canine abilities or if he thinks that these dogs can see race or ethnicity, or even sense ideology. The naturalization of loyalty to India that these dogs supposedly demonstrate has shaped much of the public and military discourse in India around street dogs in Kashmir.

Perhaps most importantly, military officials maintain that street dogs who have been trained in policing can avoid being recognized as army dogs; they can “pass” as fixtures of the local environment even as they patrol the streets for insurgents. All of these factors have contributed to the popularity of street dogs among

military officials and police authorities (Karlekar, 2011). In fact, the Indian military began, in 2017, to recruit “*desi*” (local varieties) dogs, particularly the Mudhol hound, into its ranks, dispelling the notion that *desi* dogs were “too independent minded to become disciplined professionals” and presenting these dogs as a “hardy alternative” in the face of the declining genetic diversity of service dogs globally (Bureau, 2019). The references to “passing” and “genetic diversity,” a code for miscegenation, demonstrate how the military occupation racializes sentient beings under its purview. The first batch of Mudhols was to be sent for “validation and testing” in Jammu and Kashmir before being permanently drafted into the Indian military (*The Hindu*, 2017). Important to bear in mind is that Mudhol dogs are considered “dogs of honor,” a title that recognizes their physical characteristics – a “slender body and graceful features that include elongated skull and a tapering muzzle” – as well as their fierce loyalty and bravery, attributed to their association with Hindu-warrior kings such as Chhatrapati Shivaji, a Maratha king celebrated by Hindu ideologues for his resistance to Muslim Mughal rule in Maharashtra.⁹

Indigenizing canine recruitment into the military therefore fits well within the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s much-hyped “Make in India” policy, which encourages local manufacturing, to mark the emergence of a resurgent India (*The Hindu*, 2017). The parallels between Indian manufacturing and the recruitment of “Indian” dog breeds into the military, or as pets, are striking insofar as they both rely on the assertion of a nativist pride and loyalty, and claims to liberate India from its dependencies on foreign interventions, both human and animal (*The Hindu*, 2019). Associations between Mudhols and resistance to the British in the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny further fortify their status as canine patriots (Menaskinakai, 2017). Much like Indian manufacturing, the militarization of *desi* dogs also relies on claims of India’s national resurgence, which contributes to the legitimization of Modi’s brand of xenophobia that combines a toxic blend of masculinity with an emboldened Hinduism. Modi has used the exaggerated representations of Mudhol dog patriotism to discipline what he and his party members derisively call India’s *tukde tukde gang*, a progressive group of student leaders and their political allies who dare to criticize Modi’s divisive and violent policies against India’s minorities. In a dig against Rahul Gandhi, the President of the Congress Party, for his show of support for the *tukde tukde gang*, Modi urged him to shun his “uneasiness” with nationalism by “learn[ing about] patriotism from Army’s Mudhol Hound Dogs” (*Outlook*, 2018). Mudhol dogs have thus emerged as the gold standard of Indian patriotism and the flag bearers of India’s new political dispensation that crushes democratic dissent, or ridicules it, by branding it anti-national. While Mudhol dogs are India’s honor dogs, embodiments of “royal” breeding and physical grace, other indigenous Indian dogs sometimes referred to as the “Indogs” are also increasingly hailed in India’s dog-loving circuits as “smart, friendly, and agile,” despite having suffered years of contempt and ridicule (Agarwal, 2019). In such assessments, however, the conflation between Indogs and India’s street dogs is discouraged, since the street dog continues to be construed as the racial other, a mixed-breed or mutt that threatens the purity of

the indigenous Indian dog. The indigeneity of dogs therefore also relies on a racialized scheme in which the street dog is deemed an Indian loyalist even as it remains racially inferior to the purebred Indogs. Such racialized hierarchies between dogs also stabilize distinctions between human insiders and outsiders in a context where Hindu-ness and indigeneity have become fundamental requirements for Indian statehood and citizenship. Despite the entrenched racism and xenophobia, Indian animal rights activists repeatedly invoke the care for animals as a Hindu ethic to animalize human Others for whom canine populations embody the ferocity of the state.

The dehumanization of Kashmiris and canine personhood

In contrast to the receptiveness towards street dogs exhibited by the Indian police and military personnel, and also by India's top leadership, conservative blogs assert that "terrorists" – namely, Kashmiri, Maoist, and Punjabi insurgents – urge local communities to engage in mass killings of street dogs (Karlekar, 2010, 2011). Whether to consider the street dog a friend or a foe, in effect, has become yet another index by which to denigrate Kashmiris, who are figured as inferior moral beings on account of their willingness to eliminate stray canine populations. In the hierarchy of cultural value, Kashmiris are constructed as inhabiting a status lower than dogs, evident in the dehumanizing treatment and cruelty they experience at the hands of the Indian military and the derisive discrimination they face from Indian civilians more generally. One need only recall the actions of an Indian Army major, who after gratuitously beating a young Kashmiri man, strapped him to the front of a jeep to act as a human shield against stone throwers. The young man's name was scrawled on a piece of paper affixed to his chest and a soldier blared a warning to bystanders, informing them that this was the "fate" awaiting stone pelters (Yasin and Berry, 2017). The immobilizing of the young man by tying him to the jeep evokes the tethering of dogs by ropes; his status as a human shield announces that his life matters only insofar as his body, alive or dead, protects those of the security forces from harm. Shortly after this incident, the responsible army major was awarded a military honor for what army spokesperson Colonel Aman Anand describes as "sustained efforts in CI [counter insurgency] operations" (Singh, 2017). Of course, this incident is just one of a long charge sheet against the Indian military, consisting of rapes, torture, disappearances, custodial deaths, and murder. And in Indian cities, Kashmiris periodically face threats of violence by frenzied Hindu nationalists, along with enduring the petty humiliations of encountering signs prohibiting their entrance into commercial establishments. "Dogs are allowed but not Kashmiris" reads a display in an Uttarakhand shop window, while hotels in Noida and Agra, home to many exquisite monuments built by Muslim rulers, feature placards announcing, "Kashmiris not allowed" (see Bhatnagar, 2019; Latif, 2019).

Two historic developments undergird the simultaneous dehumanization of Kashmiri Muslims and the emergent concern over animal welfare: changes in

attitudes to dogs connected to neoliberalism and the political maturation of Hindu nationalism. One consequence of the liberalization of India's economy in the early 1990s has been an explosion of new arenas for the consumption of goods and services, including pet-related markets. The drive for conspicuous consumption has changed the nature of the relationships between Indians and dogs. Prior to the opening of the Indian economy to foreign investment, most individual households did not have canine pets; more often than not, street dogs were loosely "adopted" by neighborhoods.¹⁰ These canines occupied a liminal space outside of domestication but not fully separate from it. As Krithika Srinivasan (2019: 3) explains, "food waste generated by human co-inhabitants" provides the primary sustenance for street dogs while their vehicles and buildings offer shelter. She notes that although street dogs are not feral, in the sense that they often seek human companionship, these canines exercise considerable autonomy in their day-to-day lives (Srinivasan, 2019: 3–4). The dependent autonomy of street dogs has resulted in a relationship with humans characterized by the everyday intimacies of living in a shared space. Yet even as such intimacies still color the relationship between the two species, new forms of social differentiation have emerged in the last few decades, resulting in additional complexity in the human–animal dynamic already overdetermined by India's military occupation of Kashmir.

Economic liberalization has created new subjectivities materialized in particular forms of consumption. Pet ownership has become one constituent of middle- and upper-class Indian identity, as these classes began to acquire pure-bred dogs such as beagles, labradors, and boxers, and started to buy services and stuff for their canine companions (Mukherjee, n.d.; see also Bradley and King, 2012).¹¹ The correlation between rising incomes, pet ownership, and new arenas for consumption is an essential aspect of the expansion of pet ownership and evolving attitudes towards dogs into new regions of the world (for an analysis of the expansion of Western attitudes towards pets under neoliberalism, see Nast, 2006a, 2006b). For our purposes, it is important to acknowledge the social differentiation that has occurred between canine pets and street dogs. The former are increasingly figured as members of the family in a version of canine personhood whereas attitudes towards the latter vary, spanning the range from considering them pariahs to their being worthy objects of rescue by the burgeoning Indian animal rights movement (for more on canine rescue, see Bose, 2020). Significantly, many animal rights groups, along with the Indian police and military, are transforming the liminal status of street dogs by recruiting them into counterinsurgency wars as agents of national defense and security. Rather than being "animals on the edge," street dogs are central to the political configuration of nation and territory (Fortuny, 2014: 272; Mikhail, 2015).¹² That is to say, the fluidity of identity and quasi-autonomy that characterized street dogs earlier has given way to the fixing of their identities into functionaries of the security apparatus. Insofar as the meanings assigned to dogs and their treatment are contingent on historical, geographical, and contextual factors such as the nature of the state and military occupation, the degree to which they are accorded canine personhood and rights is not static or stable and can

change in the future. The antipathy that many Kashmiris feel toward street dogs is not so much an engrained cultural attitude as it is one consequence of the militarization of the valley. Under different circumstances, the relationship between Kashmiris and street dogs might very well dramatically change, resembling the more sentimentalized human–canine connection present in many parts of the world. As we explain later, Kashmiris too categorize street dogs based on locale (village or city) and the canines’ perceived affiliation to or alienation from Indian military forces.

A growing appreciation for dogs and an attendant craze for pet ownership among Indians has become more widespread in the last three decades. Simultaneously, India’s post-independence secular ethos has morphed into a sectarian one, dominated by the majoritarian Hindu right, which has captured the state with horrific consequences for its beleaguered lower-caste Hindus and religious minorities, particularly Muslims. Evidence that India has become even more hostile to minority religions inheres in the destruction of historic mosques such as the Babri Masjid, the periodic pogroms against Dalits, Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians, and the appalling immunity from the law enjoyed by perpetrators of sectarian violence, including the increased frequency of lynchings against Dalits and Muslims in the name of *gau raksha* (cow protection) and animal protection (Govindrajan, 2018: 55). Likewise, the racialization of the sentiments of “care” and “love” for dogs is evident in India’s other contested regions, such as Nagaland, where state authorities have since 2016 passed laws to criminalize local communities who eat dogs or rely on the dog-trade for their livelihoods, invoking Naga tribal cruelty and savagery as the basis for their antipathy to dogs (Kikon, 2017). The concern over dog cruelty in dominant Indian narratives therefore has racial and sectarian resonances, especially at a time when the Hindutva turn in Indian politics is legitimized through an ethics of animal care, and Dalits and Muslims are lynched for the mere suspicion of trading in and slaughtering cows, considered sacred animals according to some Hindu mythologies.

Narendra Modi’s ascent to prime ministership in 2014 and his overwhelming electoral victory in 2019 signal the Hinduization of the polity and the normalization of communal sentiments insofar as Modi is a long-time member of the fascist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the parent organization of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Although cleared by the Supreme Court, Modi is widely believed to be implicated in the 2002 Gujarat riots in which approximately 2000 people, primarily Muslims, were murdered during his watch as chief minister of that state. Significantly, when asked in a Reuters interview whether he regretted the violence, Modi responded:

[when] someone else is driving a car and we’re sitting behind, even then if a puppy comes under the wheel, will it be painful or not? Of course it is. If I’m a chief minister or not, I’m a human being. If something bad happens anywhere, it is natural to be sad. (Gottipati and Banerji, 2013)

What is striking about this quotation is the equating of the grief he claims he would feel over the accidental death of a puppy and the purposeful massacre of Muslims.

Cross-species compassion for cows and dogs has increasingly been deployed as a marker of Indian civilizational superiority and helps reinforce Hinduism's claims of inclusivity, an ethic that stands in stark contrast to the perceived savagery of Kashmiri Muslims against street dogs based on the calls among Kashmiris to curtail the canine population. Worries over safety from dog attacks are recoded as evidence of Kashmiri barbarism, widely, albeit erroneously, believed to be sanctioned by Islamic scriptures that consider dogs to be dirty, lowly, and *haram*.¹³

The emergence of animal rights activism in India is rooted in the history of liberalism and the politics of empire building, and is reminiscent of colonial initiatives in which women's reform movements were meant to correct the civilizational deficit of Indians (Naisargi, 2014: 435). While several organizations are dedicated to animal welfare or securing their rights, Maneka Gandhi has emerged as a leading figure in the movement in her capacity as the founder of India's largest animal rights organization, People for Animals. Gandhi is credited with writing petitions against the state-sanctioned killing of street dogs, and heading an animal rights movement in India that instituted the Animal Birth Control [ABC] program for the sterilization of stray dogs (see Naisargi, 2014). As the daughter-in-law of former prime minister Indira Gandhi and widow of Sanjay Gandhi, Maneka Gandhi is also a member of the Nehru dynasty. While she is currently estranged from her sister-in-law Sonia Gandhi, the former president of the Indian National Congress, the prominence of the Gandhi family in nationalist politics contributes to her status as a trope for the Indian government. A much despised figure among most Kashmiris, Gandhi's indifference to their plight and her dogged pursuit of protection for Kashmir's stray dogs are perceived as clear indicators of what truly matters to Indian political leaders. As Iqbal, a young Kashmiri NGO worker charged, "Kashmiri blood is thinner than that of Indians," who "don't bat an eyelid" at the sight of Kashmiris being regularly mauled on the streets. In conversations with our interlocutors, more than one person expressed the desire to seek retributive justice against India by sending Kashmir's street dogs to Gandhi's New Delhi home. Gandhi's connection to the Nehru dynasty, and her background as a BJP member, long-term member of parliament, and cabinet minister in Modi's administration explains the general anger among Kashmiris towards her.

As Gandhi's BJP affiliation attests, animal rights activism in India cannot be separated from its complicity in Hindu nationalism and Islamophobia, especially in Kashmir where political struggles for *azadi* are labelled by most Indians as *jihad* and viewed as a threat to India's civilizational ethos (see Naisargi, 2014). Animal rights activism privileges the well-being of dogs and cows, but not, for example, pigs, elephants, and horses. Righteous claims about animal protection often elide fraught political contexts, in which certain human lives are considered dispensable and their livelihoods, economies, and cultural practices deemed inferior and uncivilized (Kikon, 2017: 38–9). For instance, an Indian website dedicated to animal

rights claims that “Kashmir is no place for street dogs. They are indeed pariah’s [sic]” (Vosd Dog Care, 2012). Part of a photo feature on Srinagar’s street dogs, the blogpost is meant to dispel the narrative that “Kashmir is overrun by large dog [sic] moving around in packs that attack humans on sight” (Vosd Dog Care, 2012). The photos by Sonya Ghosh, an academic, who apparently visited Kashmir “just to be able to see and observe Srinagar’s dogs,” are meant to prove that street dogs are “hardly visible” in daytime and only appear “at night to eat the waste...thrown on the road from the chicken/meat stalls” (Vosd Dog Care, 2012). Despite the dogs’ unobtrusiveness, she claims that Kashmiris have a “tradition” of shooting and poisoning hundreds of street dogs every summer. In a similar spirit, the Animal Welfare Board of India, in a scathing letter of 2011 to the then divisional commissioner from Kashmir, Asgar Samoon, a veterinarian by training, admonished him for issuing shoot-at-sight orders to kill rabid dogs and for instructing youth volunteers to perform mass sterilizations (Animal Welfare Board of India, 2011). By assigning this job to untrained professionals, the letter claimed, Samoon had “empowered the public to label any and every dog as rabid, and ensure that it is killed” (Animal Welfare Board of India, 2011).

In Kashmir, then, dogs are part of a contested landscape in which religion and politics become intertwined with the logics of an occupying state, making it impossible to separate the overwhelming compassion that Indian animal rights groups feel for street dogs from their total indifference toward the plight of Kashmiris.

Counterinsurgent canines, subversive dogs

Many Kashmiris who urge their government to kill stray dogs or devise unsuccessful schemes to exterminate them on their own are compelled to do so by the transformed social and political context of the past three decades. During this time, the emergence of animal rights activism in India coincided with the vicious counterinsurgency war in Kashmir in which stray dogs became the extended arm of the occupation. While the military relied on canine characteristics that, according to popular understandings, *inherently* make dogs potent warriors, we want to stress here the opposite. The logic of occupation shaped to a large extent the *nature* of dogs and their capacity for violence even as canine physicality (their teeth and power to lunge) were appropriated by the military as weapons of control. Yet sometimes dogs refuse to conform to the roles scripted for them by the military. For instance, despite their widespread perception as a hostile species that was being pitted against Kashmiri civilians, some dogs defied nationalist registers of loyalty and citizenship by siding with Kashmir’s “subversive” populations.

Many Kashmiris have encountered dogs in the prisons where they are incarcerated for prolonged periods without trial, during routine military raids where dogs sniff out both “terrorists” and explosives, and also during military patrolling rounds when dogs ensure that people submit to military authority. Sajad, a middle-aged man from a village in north Kashmir, was subjected to forced military labor for 13 years, during which time, the military forced him “to perform the

dirtiest of works. There was a dog for every 3–4 soldiers and they were trained to bark at us, bite us, and even injure us if we shirked from our assigned duties.” Sajad, who was not entirely certain if these were military dogs or street dogs who were trained to fight India’s counterinsurgency war, claimed that when armed resistance began in 1989, the Indian military brought dogs in droves into Kashmir from the plains of India in addition to training street dogs to act as their ancillary force.

They made us work from 4.00 in the morning until the next morning; there were at least 500 of us who were forced to labor in army camps and their strategic bases. We were asked to wash their clothes, patrol the roads, carry vegetables and firewood for them, and do every dirty damn thing you can possibly imagine. And all this was without any compensation. A few people lost their lives carrying ammunition for the military; and while we labored, the dogs followed military orders and acted as their loyal aides.

Outside the camps, even Kashmir’s street dogs “were fed bread, left-over food from military canteens, and the military’s overwhelming presence in Kashmir meant that street dogs never went hungry. They got ample food, reproduced, and over time, became arrogant and switched their loyalties.”

For Sajad, it was only when active militancy declined in 2002 that these dogs turned from camps towards neighborhoods in the city and villages to unleash their terror. Charges that the Indian military was encouraging the growth of the street dog population by feeding them in order to create a “first line of security” against insurgents and protesters and as “tools for surveillance” became commonplace even appearing on the Srinagar municipality website (Umar, 2012). The street dogs as part of India’s counterinsurgency brigade, forced Kashmiris to live in perpetual dread. Many years after Sajad moved to the city from his village, he felt the nightmarish presence of soldiers around him each time he spotted a group of dogs on the streets of Srinagar.

Despite Sajad’s portrayal of street dogs as die-hard military loyalists, which was a common perception, and their key role as force multipliers in India’s ongoing war against civilians, a few Kashmiris we spoke with offered a slightly different narrative even as they confirmed widely held perceptions about dogs as military surrogates. They suggested that street dogs could also be neighborhood guardians, who alerted residents to the presence of outsiders, including more ghostly apparitions. In one conversation, street dogs were recognized as having the ocular power to perceive divine entities on account of their purity. Such stories provide a counterpoint to the nationalist reconfiguration of street dogs, as well as widely shared Kashmiri fears of dogs as faithful military recruits. These narratives also illustrate how street dogs are not always perceived by Kashmiris as passive subjects who universally heed the military’s call to recruit them as tools of counterinsurgency. Instead, the perception of street dogs as either friend or foe is based on their “dynamic and distinctive materiality,” shaped by their spatial location, food

intake, and their physical characteristics (Govindrajan, 2018: 66). While the military occupation provides the overall framework in which street dogs and Kashmiris operate, the armed forces do not determine the forms of agency and resistance exercised by humans and how they, in turn, perceive and interact with canines.

For Saqib, a 23-year-old man from a village in north Kashmir, the street dogs in his village were people's allies:

Until a few years back we would hear dogs bark a lot in the dark (*hyun ais wothan*). And everyone knew that the military was patrolling the streets so people would turn their lights off, lock their doors, and worry about family members who had not yet returned home.

Saqib recalls that families often debated whether these dogs barked only at the military or also when they saw or smelled "dark things," a metaphor for death. "Some of my folks would say that dogs can smell the barrel of the gun and see human dead bodies because their eyes are pure/clean." Yet according to Riyaz, Saqib's friend who was from a neighboring village and part of this conversation, "dog saliva '*laal*'" was *haraam* in Islam so if humans came in contact with it, they were supposed to cleanse themselves through "*gusul*" (ritual ablutions). However, Saqib interrupted him with the claim that dogs were:

endowed with the power to see angels and also *malkulmyot* (death), a power that humans do not have in Islamic theology. Even if they stay up all night, they will always relax after the *fajar baang* [early morning call to prayer]. This is what Allah ordained for them.¹⁴

Despite their different views of the status of dogs in Islam, Saqib and Riyaz agreed that village (*gamik*) dogs were not military loyalists. On the contrary, every time the military came out of their bunkers to patrol the streets, the village dogs started barking regardless of the time of the day. Saqib recalled incidents where he saw soldiers being surrounded by a pack of dogs; their bark sending signals to local rebels to hide or take shelter. "They are light sleepers (*hyoon nender*)" because of which they were useful for alerting people to military movements. For Saqib and Riyaz, village dogs were "morally superior" to city dogs for two primary reasons: the association of urban canines with the decadence of city living and their degradation through the ingestion of trash, including the waste from military camps.¹⁵ Unlike city dogs who survived on garbage, village dogs ate more wholesome food, which was served to them. "In the city, we only cook for 3–4 people because city dogs don't eat rice, but in villages dogs wait for their share of food outside the door." But the distinctions between village and city dogs have blurred over time, which, we speculate, can be attributed to rumors of municipality workers packing their trucks with city dogs in the dead of the night and dumping them in villages to reduce the canine population in urban areas.

Within Srinagar, which recorded 30,711 dog bites in the last six years, the Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC) and local residents engage in mutual recriminations over responsibility for the canine menace (*Business Standard*, 2018). Residents charge the SMC with not taking serious steps to reduce the number of street dogs while the SMC blames the dietary habits of residents for encouraging the growth of the canine population. In addition to military cantonments, street dogs congregate around residential garbage heaps and restaurants. Mutton and chicken, common in the Kashmiri diet, result in readily available “high-protein offal” thrown away by residents and devoured by street dogs. SMC officials attribute the “ferocity” of street dogs to the consumption of this food source (*Rising Kashmir*, 2019). Explanations such as this one further contribute to the denigration of urban street dogs relative to village ones because of their ingestion of garbage. Implicit in this valuation is a critique of class hierarchies as well: middle- and upper-class neighborhoods have a ready supply of offal, as do restaurants and other eating establishments. The sheer excess of meat, which city dwellers can afford to throw away, becomes a signifier of urban decadence, in turn, projected onto city dogs.

It is not just differences in the kind of food that they eat which distinguishes city dogs from village ones, but also the manner in which they acquire sustenance. The impersonality of scavenging in the neighborhood dump is replaced in the village by the intimacy of people feeding dogs, human–animal interactions that are embedded in everyday relationships. Such “embodied distinctions” between village and urban dogs, based on what they eat, with whom they align, and how they behave represent a complex political terrain in which Kashmiris are constantly negotiating the boundaries between insiders/outsideers and between those they can or cannot trust (Govindrajan, 2018: 96). For instance, even Sajad emphasized how, in the 1990s, at the beginning of the Kashmiri *tehreek* (movement), dogs from the Indian plains were brought in droves to Kashmir. These dogs tended to be more *furteela* (agile) and “cunning” since they would bite arbitrarily. Although the contrast between city and village dogs was not as explicit in Sajad’s narrative, he claimed that most dogs he encountered in military camps were from outside Kashmir. As evidence he did not hate dogs, Sajad recalled his childhood companion, a dog who took care of his family’s cattle.

She would accompany them to pasturelands every morning at 5.00 and return by sundown without any human supervision. One day the cattle went missing and the dog was gone too. But she brought them back safe after two long days. Hers is a face, I could never forget.

Sajad’s insistence that there were key distinctions between dogs who were local and those brought from elsewhere was anchored in his experiences with them in two dramatically different contexts – disparate, albeit intimate encounters, that made him see outsider and insider dogs as “differentially material” (Govindrajan, 2018: 66).

Rather than having a fixed, unitary meaning, street dogs simultaneously embody multiple, contradictory ones. Sometimes perceived as extensions of the Indian Army and at other times considered to be neighborhood sentinels aligned with local Kashmiris, they are constructed as both weapons of the state and guardians of the community. All of these meanings, however, derive from the larger context of the Indian military occupation of the valley.

Resisting dog terror

In the face of their dehumanization by Indian civilians and security forces, Kashmiris have asserted their own humanity, in part by drawing attention to the disparate status of street dogs and Kashmiris under the rule of law. Apart from engaging in creative forms of protest, they have sought to redress their grievances through legal channels such as the drafting of bills and petitions to the Jammu and Kashmir High Court. A petition filed in the High Court of Jammu and Kashmir by two advocates and a law student in 2011 urged the Chief Justice to issue immediate directives to multiple branches of the government and the military to tackle the “issue of dog menace” in Kashmir, which, the petitioners claimed, had endangered human lives and “[restricted] their right to movement and [made] them live in a dreadful and fearful world” (Hanjura et al., 2011). Labelling children as the most vulnerable population who were haunted most by the fear of dogs, the petition used humanist registers of compassion and empathy to draw the court’s attention to the perpetual dread faced by Kashmiris from street dogs, nurtured by the military, and given a free-rein to reproduce by the local government, which had failed to implement the ABC program (e.g. a spay and neuter campaign) carried out elsewhere in India.

In a more dramatic and provocative July 2012 protest, Engineer Rashid, a former Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), gathered 60 dogs from the streets of his constituency to release inside the Jammu and Kashmir Civil Secretariat building. Calling it a “civil protest” against the pervasiveness of “dog terror” that had reached unprecedented levels in Kashmir, with over 25,000 bites in the last three years, Rashid echoed the vocabulary of the petitioners, describing street dogs as a “menace,” injuring people and killing young children with impunity (Ashiq, 2012). After his bid to enter the premises of the civil secretariat was thwarted by the police, MLA Rashid introduced a private member’s bill in the state assembly, once again prodding the government to curb the growing population of dogs in the state. The 2015 Jammu and Kashmir Curbing the Menace of Stray Dogs bill demanded that local authorities be empowered to kill the dogs in extreme situations; if it had passed, the bill would have defied stringent national laws instituted after Maneka Gandhi’s Public Interest Litigations, mandating that sterilization should replace the culling of street dogs. In his assembly address, Engineer Rashid made a heartfelt plea, asking the government to at least consider “getting rid of stray dogs” since they had failed to rid Kashmir of the Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFPSA), the controversial emergency law that

suspends habeas corpus and gives the Indian military total impunity for their gory record of human rights violations in Kashmir (Ashiq, 2012).

Engineer Rashid's contrast between the AFPSA that shields the Indian military from prosecution, and even encourages them to kill, rape, maim, and disappear Kashmiris, and the legal protections enjoyed by street dogs in Kashmir acts as a reminder that canine personhood can be an alibi to justify the dehumanization of those living under a brutal military occupation. Not surprisingly, the petition, bill, and protest relied on invocations of humanism to assert Kashmiris' basic rights to life, mobility, and freedom from fear. The Kashmiri claim to these rights pitted their welfare against that of street dogs, an articulation that runs contrary to dominant formulations of animal rights and vision of an inclusive world in which non-human and human survival are weighted equally. Some versions of animal rights activism in India imbue particular animals with rights while displacing their animality onto precarious human populations. To the extent that animal rights activism remains committed to a very narrow understanding of universal rights for animals, without considering situations where animality becomes a circulating metaphor to justify authoritarian military rule, it has not eschewed the otherness that constitutes the human-animal divide in the first instance.

Throughout this article, we have argued that the militarization of Kashmir shapes local perceptions of the astoundingly large number of street dogs which roam the valley. We have sought to demonstrate that the relationship between Kashmiris and street dogs is complex and characterized by contradictory meanings that depend on locale (village or city) and the highly militarized context of human-canine interactions. In 2015, when we conducted our ethnographic interviews, we were struck by our interlocutors' belief that the Indian military had either imported street dogs into Kashmir or encouraged their proliferation by giving them leftover food from the cantonments. Such explanations function as an origin narrative for the large street dog population and contribute to the general sense that these animals were tools of counterinsurgency. Yet what might have been dismissed as rumor then, had been transformed into a historical reality by 2017, as the Indian Army began to "recruit" and train street dogs to become MWDs. This point underscores how the boundaries between the categories of street dog and MWD are fluid and historically contingent.

The origin narrative of street dogs in Srinagar constructs the rapid growth in their population as a canine invasion deliberately plotted by the Indian military. The recent revocation of Articles 370 and 35A of the Indian Constitution by the BJP-led government clears the way for a different invasion of sorts, this time of Indians intent on acquiring property in the valley, something not previously possible. Kashmiris fear that a large influx of Indians will price them out of land ownership and shift the demographic balance, making them minorities in their own land. Property deeds have been added to the arsenal of the Indian government's military occupation and its moves to quash Kashmir aspirations for sovereignty. It is now no longer merely street dogs and soldiers who are unwelcome

members of Kashmir's resident population, but also potentially new Indian settlers.

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Notes

1. Throughout this article, we have had to squelch our reluctance to use repetitious vocabulary by calling the canines who are our focus: "street dogs." Alternative designations such as "stray dogs" or "pye dogs," we feel, do not adequately capture the liminal status of these animals or the affective investments that they inspire. While street dogs are not pets, they may be highly beloved in certain neighborhoods. The term "strays" glosses over the rootedness of this canine population in specific locales. "Pye dogs," a common Asian name for street dogs, derives from "pariah," a designation at odds with the "relationship" of care that can develop between humans and canines.
2. Approximately 60 per cent of Indian MWDs are Labrador Retrievers, while the remainder are German Shepherds with a few Belgian Malinois and Rottweilers thrown into the mix.
3. We draw on Lisa Uddin's (2003) formulation of "canine citizenship" as the "particular set of meanings about public participation" that is invested in dogs.
4. Allsopp provides a brief history of Indian MWDs and notes that India is a major source of MWDs for allies and for UN Peacekeeping forces.
5. For the weaponization of dogs in Afghanistan, see Nadeem Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden* (2014).
6. The LoC is the boundary that divides Pakistan-controlled Kashmir from Indian-controlled Kashmir and was the de facto boundary demarcated in 1972 under the Simla Agreement, though its status remains contested among Kashmiris, Indians, and Pakistanis. *The Times of India* (2016) cites the 1,200 figure for MWDs.
7. As of July 2019, the number of troops was 700,000. In August 2019, the government deployed an additional 38,000 troops to the region.
8. See Karlekar (2011). The article refers to this source as Lt-Col. N.K. Airy. See Girard (2012) for another example of how authorities believed that particular dogs could differentiate among human beings. According to Girard, the French thought that combat dogs imported from Cuba during the Leclerc-Rochambeau expedition to Haiti (1802–3)

could detect smell and capture runaway slaves because of their ability to recognize blood, a clear marker of phenotypical differences. Distinctions in blood among humans, the French believed, were visible to the canine eye (Boisseron, 2015; Girard, 2012). While the dogs sometimes thwarted the French efforts to use them solely as slave hunters, the naturalization of difference – racial, ethnic, or ideological – that drove such efforts continues to inform the deployment of dogs in military operations globally.

9. See 'Dogs of honor: Mudhol dogs': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ePiy0BstJUo>
10. While India has one of the lowest rates of dog ownership in the world (1 dog per 1000 people), Theresa Bradley and Ritchie King (2012) note that it had the fastest growth of dog ownership in 2012, increasing by 58.1% from 2007 to 2012.
11. *Business Wire* (2019) estimates that the compounded annual rate of growth for the pet industry market from 2013 to 2018 is over 21%.
12. Mikhail (2015) discusses the effects of changing state regimes in Egypt on human–animal relationships.
13. For the reformist ideology on animals in Islam see Mikhail (2016) and Taneja (2015). See also Gagné (2018) for an elaboration of how Buddhists in Ladakh claim virtuousness over their Muslim counterparts by mobilizing ethics of care and compassion for dogs.
14. The place of dogs in Islam is deeply contested by conflicting hadiths that either portray dogs as evil or impure and call for their extermination or put forth pro-dog arguments based on legal and scholarly interpretations that depict Prophet Mohammed's sensitivity toward dogs and their ability to move freely in Medina and even enter the Prophet's mosque. For a detailed discussion of hadiths related to the place of dogs in Islam, see Subasi (2011) *Dogs in Islam*.
15. For instance, during the devastating floods of 2014, a rumor surfaced that attributed the onset of the floods to moral and spiritual decay in Rajbagh, Srinagar's posh neighborhood, where a family had organized a birthday bash for their pet dog and invited a *moulvi* to grace the occasion. Other Kashmiris believed that the Indian government had orchestrated the floods as part of a genocidal campaign against them. These rumors speak to existing moral anxieties related to class and wealth distinctions in a context of chronic violence; but they also identify material and existential threats posed by powerful outside forces that present themselves to Kashmiris in different forms: as soldiers, as floodwaters, and as dogs from the Indian plains.

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